DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 184 EA 025 808

TITLE How Our Investment in Education Pays Off.
INSTITUTION American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87652-191-X
PUB DATE [94]
NOTE 25p.
AVAILABLE FROM American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209 (Stock No. 21-00431).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Involvement; *Educational Benefits; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Outcomes of Education; *Public Schools; Quality of Life

ABSTRACT

This booklet details the ways in which public education is a sound investment for this society and its members. Sections illustrate the ways in which education benefits society by: providing greater earning power; enriching the quality of life in communities; promoting equal opportunity; maintaining a free market economy; enhancing personal fulfillment; ensuring world leadership; and preserving democracy. Tips for investing in schools and getting involved are also provided. Two tables and one figure are included. (LMI)

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How Our Investment in Education Pays Off

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AASA stock no.: 21-00431
ISBN: 0-87652-191-X
Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 93-071161

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson, our nation's third president and the author of the Declaration of Independence, made it clear that our democracy depends on an educated citizenry: "A nation that hopes to be ignorant and free...hopes for something that never was and never will be."

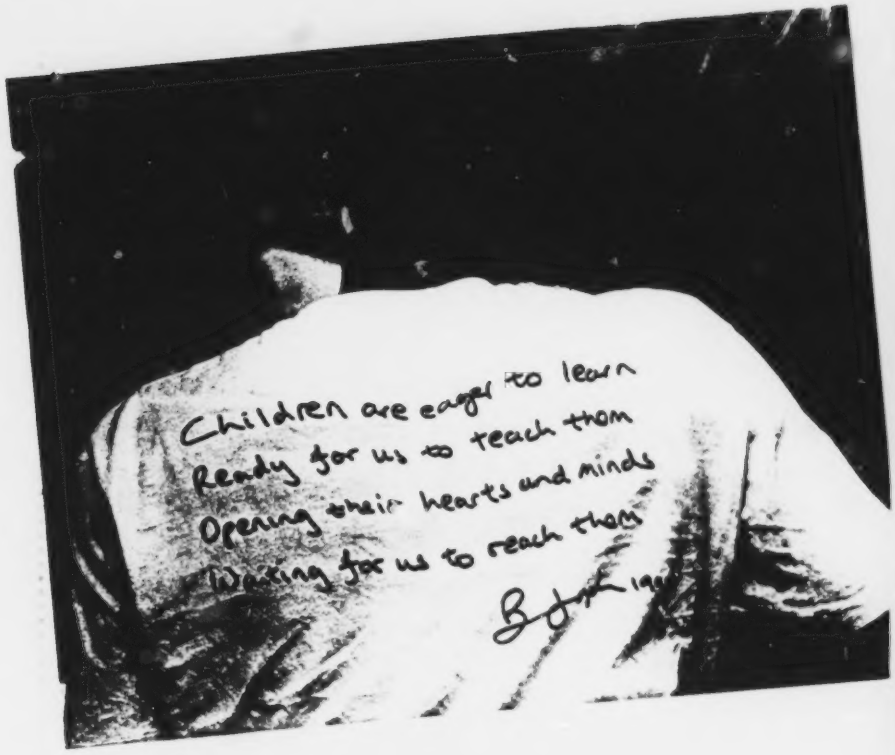
In fact, education is the best investment we can make — one that pays off in countless dividends, for us, for our children, and for society.

A monumental mission. Our public schools are charged with being everything to everybody. Consequently, educators have taken on more duties than ever before, acting as social workers, disciplinarians, psychologists, nutritionists, motivators, advisors, friends, nurses, and confidants.

Although the task sometimes seems insurmountable, educators push on, knowing how vital their work is to children's futures. The impact a good education has on a person's life is tremendous and lasts for generations. Looking at the many strides yesterday's students have made in technology, medicine, communications, and other fields offers confidence in education and the future. Public schools equip us with what we need to contribute to the world community. Without it, we are lost.

A sound investment. With these thoughts in mind, can education really be viewed as an expense? This booklet illustrates just a few of the ways education pays off for society by:

- Providing greater earning power
- Enriching the quality of life in our communities
- Promoting equal opportunity
- Maintaining our free market economy
- Enhancing our personal fulfillment
- Ensuring our world leadership
- Preserving our democracy.



"Let us think of education as a means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each child there is a private hope and dream, which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefits for everyone and greater strength for our nation."

–former President John F. Kennedy

1 Providing Greater Earning Power

Americans invest more time and money than ever before in getting an education. Does it pay off? The answer is a resounding "Yes." Our investment in education pays off in better jobs, higher salaries, and increased job security for America's workers. Educated people also create jobs by developing new ideas, inventions, and industries.

• **Education increases the likelihood of getting higher paying and professional jobs.** In fact, says Gerald Bracey, author of the *Bracey Report on the Condition of Education*, "High school graduates earn twice as much as high school dropouts." U.S. Census Bureau statistics back him up:

Education and Earnings

Education Level	Average Monthly Earnings
High school dropouts	$492
High school graduates with no college	$1,077
Vocational degree holders	$1,237
Professional degree holders	$4,961

Source: "1990 Survey of Income and Program Participation," U.S. Census Bureau.

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

–Derek Bok, former president, Harvard University

Futurist Marvin Cetron, author of *Schools of the Future*, says, "I see the payoff [of education] in getting jobs...Salaries are going to depend on education."

• **Education leads to greater employability and prepares students for the jobs of the future.** Education opens doors to better jobs. As our economy continues to change, workers with higher levels of education are more likely to remain employed.

Increasingly, employers want advanced training — apprenticeships, technical school or college degrees — for highly paid jobs. Not surprisingly, society's most promising or respected professions and vocations, such as medicine, education, engineering, metal workers, and electricians, all require specialized or advanced degrees.

High school dropouts and others who have been unable to complete their education simply are frozen out of a large part of our economy. For them, the American dream seems to be more rumor than reality.

True, the number of low-skill, low-wage jobs has increased, especially in certain parts of the service industry. Unfortunately, many of these jobs offer little job security and little or no chance to advance.

Today, a high school education, with the expectation of more specific training of at least two to three years, is the minimum starting point for a secure, well-paying career.

"The average high school dropout can expect to:

- Lose $325,000 in lifetime earnings compared to a high school graduate
- Cost the U.S. government $97,714 in lost tax revenue."

Source: National Alliance of Business, 1987

"Today's high school dropouts can expect to earn approximately one-third less each year than those who graduate."

Source: 1991 Kids Count Data Book, Annie E. Casey Foundation

2 Enriching the Quality of Life in Our Communities

A strong school system improves communities. For many, quality schools rank high on the list of reasons to move into a community. Furthermore, poverty and crime levels generally are lower in educated populations. Culture and the arts also flourish when they are supported by an educated population. Simply stated, strong schools enhance the quality of our lives.

- **Education increases a community's standard of living.** Poverty and a lack of education often are closely linked. More than any other factor, a good education will reduce a person's chances of living in poverty, says Harold Hodgkinson of the Center for Demographic Policy.

  Many children who live in poverty do so because of their parents' lack of education. These 1990 statistics from "Five Million Children," a report from the National Center for Children in Poverty, illustrate the dramatic connection between education and poverty: 62 percent of children under age six whose parents had not completed high school lived in poverty, and 19 percent of children where one parent had a high school diploma lived in poverty. In contrast, only 4 percent of children who had at least one parent with some education beyond high school lived in poverty.

- **Education creates and nurtures cultural experiences and opportunities.** Imagine a world with no artists, educators, musicians, dancers, actors, or writers. Suppose our communities had no theaters, orchestras, art galleries, zoos, or museums. In a world without education, many of the cultural institutions we take for granted would not exist.

"Today more than ever, education is not just an issue for children. We must be concerned about people of all ages and backgrounds, citizens and newcomers, those who are illiterate and those who are not. The future of America depends on it."

–former First Lady Barbara Bush

Many times, the experiences and knowledge gained through education are the stimulus for creative and artistic works, as well as important discoveries. Education encourages us to observe and think critically about the world around us. School is where children explore the world through literature, history, social studies, and fine arts classes. It is where they learn to communicate by studying other languages and cultures. For many children, school is the only place where they are exposed to worlds outside their own.

• **Education reduces crime by providing skills, direction, and hope.** It's tragic, but it's true — education, or rather the lack of it, affects the level of criminal activity.

"A dollar invested in Head Start is about eight dollars in jails you don't need to build [and] drug detox centers you don't have to staff," Harold Hodgkinson, a demographer, said in 1987.

He also pointed out that the relationship between high school dropout rates and the number of people in prison is even greater than the relationship between smoking and lung cancer.

In *The Same Client*, a 1989 publication for the Institute for Educational Leadership, Hodgkinson found that states with high graduation rates tended to have the lowest number of prisoners per 100,000 people. Conversely, states with high dropout rates have more prisoners. In our prisons today, more than 80 percent of all inmates are high school dropouts, Hodgkinson says. Maintaining each of those prisoners costs taxpayers upwards of $20,000 annually.

"Indeed, in Pennsylvania, it is seven times more expensive to keep someone in the state 'pen' than to have someone at Penn State," Hodgkinson says.

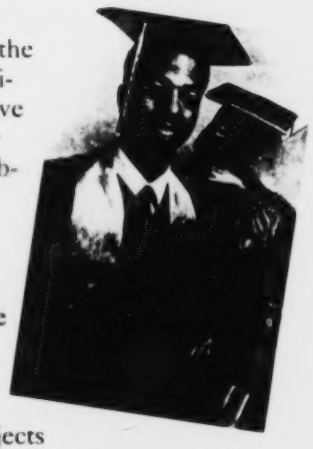
"Pay Me Now or Pay Me Later"

Pay $1 now on...	and save
Childhood immunization	$10 in later medical costs
Preschool education	$4.75 in special education, welfare, and prison costs
Remedial education	$6 in the cost of repeating a grade

Source: 1987 Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families

3 Promoting Equal Opportunity

The public school system is the foundation for the American dream. Regardless of one's race, religion, or family income, our nation's schools give every child the same chance for success. Today, as our nation and our world become increasingly diverse, public schools offer a model of how people from varied backgrounds can work together.



- **Public schools educate all children.** The racial, ethnic, and religious diversity among school-age children has never been greater. In some school districts, it's not uncommon for students to speak more than 100 native languages. By the year 2020, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights projects that 46 percent of public school students will be members of what we now call "minority groups."

Clearly, if our nation is to continue prospering, *all* children must have an equal opportunity to become productive workers and to be full participants in our free and democratic society. Shirley McBay, president of the Quality Education for Minorities Network, points out, "We cannot prosper as a nation if the fastest growing group of workers [today's minority students] continues to face barriers in critical fields and remains largely neglected as a prime resource for economic growth."

"Improving prospects for disadvantaged children is not an expense, but an excellent investment, one that may be postponed only at much greater cost to society."

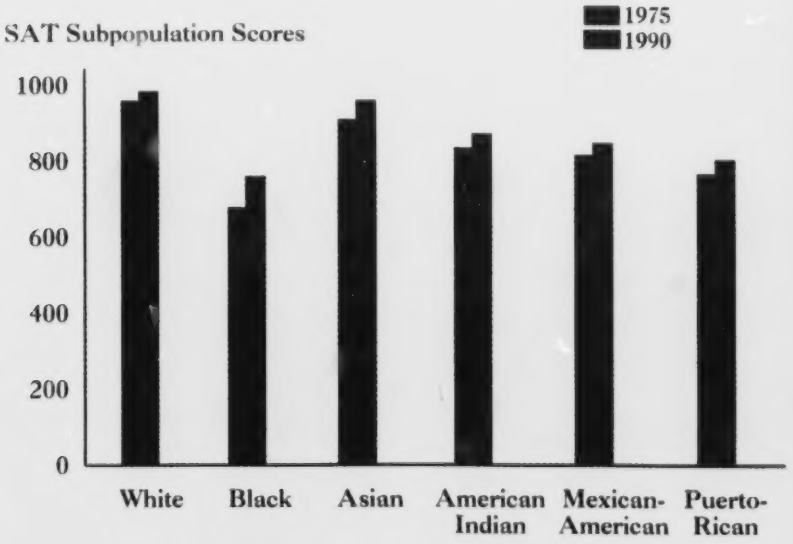
–Committee for Economic Development

• **Schools help all children achieve.** Schools face daunting challenges, as the *Wall Street Journal* noted:

> The problems of America's schools stem in large part from causes deep in the national experience: urban blight, the erosion of the family, and the longstanding failure to devote sufficient resources to the schools. In the face of these pressures, schools have been called upon to take over roles formerly played by the family, churches, and other agencies, ranging from sex education to housing and feeding children from dawn to dusk, well beyond school hours.

Despite these obstacles, today's schools are meeting the needs of all children better than they did in the past. Although an achievement gap still remains between white and minority students, some signs indicate that overall student achievement is rising. For example, the chart below illustrates how SAT scores have increased for members of all ethnic groups, but have risen faster for nonwhite than white students.

Minority Achievement on the Rise



Source: Adapted from C.C. Carson, R. M. Huelskamp, and T. D. Woodall, "Perspectives on Education in America," third draft, Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, N.M., May 1991, p.41, from data supplied by the Educational Testing Service and the National Center for Education Statistics.

Many Interests, Many Opportunities

An avid athlete and letterman on his high school's varsity track team, Clintonyo Gullatte also has a track record of solid academic achievement and community service.

In his hometown of Auburn, Alabama, Gullatte is active in the Big Brother program and in several civic organizations at Auburn High School. As an ambassador for his school's International Student Organization, Gullatte helps new students, especially those from foreign countries, adapt more easily to his school and to American ways of education.

"This organization also promotes ethnic unity and cultural awareness," he said.

Gullatte, the oldest of four children in a single-parent home, has risen above many obstacles. He has had to balance additional responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and babysitting with his studies and athletic interests.

"I want to continue my education because the world in the 21st century is going to be too complex for a person not to have an education beyond high school," he said.

After graduating, Gullatte said he planned to attend college and become a veterinarian.

—Clintonyo Gullatte was one of nine national Discover Card Tribute Award Winners in 1993. Discover Card Services, Inc., sponsors the Tribute Award in cooperation with AASA.

- **Education promotes an understanding of others.**

Author and poet Maya Angelou called education a great equalizer when children of all colors share an understanding of what each race offers. Schools lay the foundation of equal opportunity by providing daily chances for children to better their understanding of others.

By empowering students to reach their potential, public schools allow every child to participate fully in our economy and democracy.

Maintaining Our Free Market Economy 4

"Without an educated workforce, we can't grow this economy or remain competitive. We all have to work together—business and government, labor and educators—to make things happen."

–President Bill Clinton

Our future employees — our future consumers — are today's students. Public schools promote our free market economy by increasing students' career awareness, offering them both liberal arts and vocational education, and preparing today's youth to enter a competitive world market.

In short, better educated workers, who understand the economy and how they contribute to it, are better equipped to increase our nation's competitive edge and to meet the economic challenges of the 21st century.

- **Education ensures our children will be well-prepared for the challenges of the workforce.** Quite simply, "If we don't [educate our children], we can't compete in the world," says futurist Marvin Cetron.

Increased productivity leads to an improved standard of living. In this light, the payoff of investing in our schools comes in better educated kids who become better prepared employees, as well as people with spendable income that will stimulate the market for tomorrow's products and services.

- **Schools give future workers the skills they need to compete.** Today's workforce requires workers who are well-grounded in math, technology, and science skills. By the year 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that 52 percent of all new jobs will require education beyond high school.

Not only will tomorrow's workers need to know more math and science than ever before, but they also will need the ability to work with others. In factories of the future, workers will not be automatons — they will be active decision makers and problem solvers. By helping students develop these skills, America's schools ensure our children will be able to compete in this changed environment.

"If you do not know how to use a computer, you can't think in the future tense."

Jennifer Cobb
cultural anthropologist

- **Education preserves the middle class.** Without public schools to teach all children, America would become a two-tiered society of haves and have-nots. Through public education, Americans have the same opportunity to better themselves...and to achieve the American dream.

- **Schools teach students the fundamentals of our free market economy.** Through participating in work-study programs, taking part in Distributive Education clubs, studying economic theories, and other activities, today's students leave school with a better understanding of our free market system. In some states, even first-graders study basic economics concepts, such as supply and demand.

- **Schools promote the understanding and use of technology.** Technology is changing the way we live and work. In our global society, computers, faxes, videos, and other telecommunications have enabled us to talk with others in the blink of an eye. Children in one district can now take other subjects, such as a foreign language or math class not offered in their own school, through distance learning.

In offices and factories, computers also have led to major changes in the way we do our jobs. While many adults have resisted learning about computers, most of today's students have grown up accepting computers as a fact of life. This is largely due to the exposure and training they get in computer technology at school. (After all, in most homes, the children are among the first to learn to program the VCR!)

Preparing Today's Students for Tomorrow's World

Since 1989, Project C^3—Community, Corporations, and Classrooms— has been helping the 72,000 students in the Fort Worth, Texas, Independent School District gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the workforce of the future.

Project C^3 is a learning partnership with businesses, higher education, and community members. By reaching out to businesses and community groups, the project also has strengthened community support for education. Some of the program's initiatives are:

- Vital Link, a middle school program that allows students to visit businesses and learn how reading, math, and writing skills translate into work skills in fields ranging from medicine to aviation;
- Tech Lab 2000, a computer network in middle and high schools that enables students to study robotics, satellites, aerodynamics, and other technologies;
- Writing and technology classrooms where students work cooperatively to create "reader-friendly" documents for businesses, government agencies, and community organizations.

"It's designed to change the way we do business," said Don Roberts, Forth Worth's superintendent. Through applied learning activities, the project "makes learning meaningful for students, instead of just learning so they can take a test."

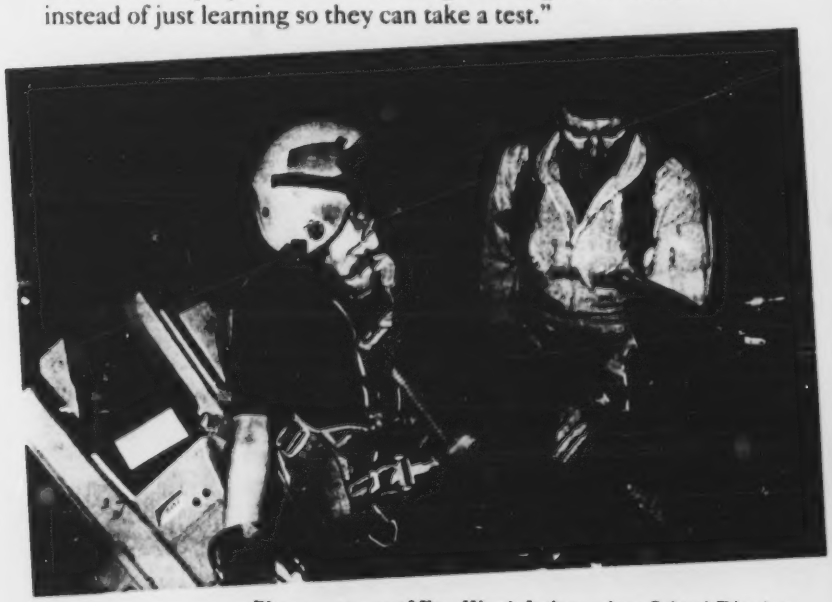


Photo courtesy of Fort Worth Independent School District.

5 Enhancing Our Personal Fulfillment

Think about the first time you understood that those squiggles on the page were actually words...and that you could understand them. Or, think about the first time you looked through a microscope, played an instrument, or understood what someone was saying in another language. There is no thrill quite like that of mastering a challenging concept or problem. Schools seek to give that same opportunity to every American child every day.

- **Education encourages students to strive for excellence.** Most people have a natural need to set and meet goals. We strive to reach and push the limits of our potential. Schools help students reach for excellence by setting high standards for them and by teaching them to set goals, as well as by helping students measure their academic achievement.

- **Education gives students life skills.** Not all the lessons schools teach are academic. Through their schooling, students also learn self-discipline, patience, and the importance of sharing. They learn to pay attention when others are speaking...and they learn that others will listen to what they say. Many schools teach children how to solve disagreements through conflict resolution and reasoning, rather than violence. Extracurricular activities, ranging from student government offices to volunteer projects, offer other opportunities to learn life skills.

Sadly, for some children whose parents pay little attention to them or their needs, school may be the *only* place they can learn these important lessons.

In his book *Technical Education*, Thomas Henry Huxley talks about the importance of life lessons. "Perhaps the most valuable result of education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to do, when

"A liberal education not only imparts the great lessons of history, citizenship, and science, it teaches people to think, to solve problems, to take risks...to think independently, to step back from problems and the crowd, to be an entrepreneur and innovator."

–David Kearns, former CEO, Xerox Corporation, former deputy secretary of education

they ought to be done, whether you like it or not," he writes. "It is the first lesson that ought to be learned...and it is probably the last lesson learned thoroughly."

- **Education gives students the opportunity to explore their interests and develop talents.** School is usually where children learn about their special talents and abilities, such as art, music, math, or writing. Sometimes, school is the only place where kids get positive feedback, the chance to receive awards and scholarships, or participate in team sports.

Overcoming Challenges

Florence Lagos spoke only Spanish when she started elementary school in Florida. By the time she attended North M rion High School in Citra, Florida, she could speak and write English fluently. She even wrote articles for her local newspaper.

Lagos described how her education, while difficult, helped her set and reach high personal goals:

"I came to Florida from New York without knowing a word of English. Despite my situation, I endeavored to excel academically. When I arrived at middle school in the sixth grade, there were certain subjects that I just couldn't grasp, such as English, math, and science. I remember how many nights and early mornings my mother stayed up with me studying homework.

"When she and I look back to those years, thinking about how many tutors I had and the long hours of studying that every one of my sleepless nights included, we see that it was worth it. When I was a little girl, my dreams were always of the thought that I wanted to be not just somebody, but someone who has reached her highest potential. That is just one of the many reasons why, even though I have felt like giving up, I never have."

After high school, Lagos said she planned to continue her education and become a computer technician.

—Florence Lagos received one of nine national Discover Card Tribute Awards in 1993. Discover Card Services, Inc., sponsors the Tribute Award in cooperation with AASA.

6 Ensuring Our World Leadership

Today, the world is truly growing smaller. Satellite communication and other technologies have made the concept of a "global village" into reality. We can communicate with other nations and watch events occurring anywhere on the globe almost instantaneously. Our country and our economy are now multinational. We must ensure that our children have an education that prepares them to excel in this international marketplace.

"If I've learned one thing, it's that the answer to virtually all our national problems — from international competitiveness to improving our standard of living to the very security of our nation — ultimately rests on one word ... 'education.'"

–Robert Kirkpatrick, chairman, CIGNA

- **Other nations are investing in education.** Germany, Japan, and many other industrialized nations are investing heavily in education — investments that may be paying off in improved standards of living. In *Rebuilding America's Workforce*, William Kolberg and Foster Smith note that, since 1972, the U.S. standard of living grew just 33 percent. In contrast, Japan's standard of living increased by nearly 80 percent, and Germany's rose by 48 percent.

  Although many factors have contributed to Germany and Japan's growth, some of the most important keys to their development are sound public education, extensive school-to-work transition programs, and continuous worker training and education.

  "Neither Japan nor Europe have an inherent technological advantage...However, they have earned their global competitive edge by making sustained and significant investments in education and training for all their citizens. Is it not time for America to do the same?" asks Edward E. Gordon, executive director of the North American Institute for Training and Education Research.

- **Education helps our students compete in the global economy.** At one point, the United States was considered a great industrial leader. Today, our global perspective means that Americans and others know they can

"shop around" for cars, electronics, and other consumer goods. As the quality of products from countries such as Japan, Germany, and Korea increases, America must work ever harder to educate and train its workforce.

Doing His Best

Damon Hart, a 1993 graduate of Mumford High School in Detroit, knows the real world can be a tough, formidable place, especially for youth in big cities. His urban upbringing made Hart "do that much more to get ahead...I'm more cognizant of the competition out there," he says.

Valedictorian of his 500-member class, Hart successfully balanced a rigorous academic schedule with extracurricular activities. He volunteered about 10 hours a week in Mumford's technical center, assisting classmates with computer projects. Hart is convinced all students — including urban youth — have the potential to learn and achieve.

"Students in Detroit are bright and intelligent...but many of them need a real goal or an extra incentive to reach their potential," he says.

At Mumford High School, many students found this incentive through a schoolwide compact with several area businesses. Under the compact, students could receive scholarships and guaranteed jobs in exchange for maintaining high academic standards.

Hart left Mumford in 1993 to study computer engineering at Western Michigan University. He plans to return frequently and "emphasize the importance of education" to future graduates by serving as a positive role model and speaking to students interested in engineering.

–Damon Hart received the 1993 National Superintendent of the Year Scholarship, cosponsored by AASA and The ServiceMaster Company of Downer's Grove, Illinois.

7 Preserving Our Democracy

America is a country drawn from many racial, national, and religious origins. Since the earliest days of our nation, one of the most important jobs of the public schools has been to instill in students the values of democracy.

- **Education creates a common vision of democracy.** Despite our many differences, Americans are united by a commitment to liberty, justice, and equality, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

But a democracy cannot thrive in an uneducated population or in a society where only an elite few are educated. America's pledge to provide free public education to all recognizes that access to knowledge is not a privilege — it's a right. When we support our public schools, we're supporting the democratic ideals on which our nation was founded.

- **Schools empower students to become active, concerned citizens.** Schools teach students about our nation's history, as well as about understanding and appreciating the different cultures that shaped our country.

School is the first place where many children read the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution and begin to understand what these documents mean to them. Our schools introduce students to their rights as citizens and to many of the important principles of our government, such as separation of powers, checks and balances, and judicial review. Debates, mock elections, and other learning activities in schools give students hands-on experience with our laws and government.

"What spectacle can be more edifying...than that of Liberty and Learning, each leaning on the other for their mutual and surest support?"

–James Madison

A Hands-On Civics Lesson

Each year, the National Student/Parent Mock Election helps junior high and high school students understand one of the most important concepts of a democratic society: the right to vote. The Mock Election makes students aware of the power of their ballot by actively involving them in a full-fledged national election. In addition to casting their votes for president and state and local offices, students learn about the voting process and the major policy issues surrounding each election.

A study conducted by the University of Colorado of 280 eighth- and ninth-graders in Boulder County, Colorado, found that students who participated in the 1992 Mock Election:

- Learned to make reasoned judgments about candidates for office.
- Understood that citizens can make a difference in how our country is run.
- Became more informed about current political issues.
- Valued their social studies classes more for helping them to understand the world around them.
- Increased their discussions about political and other school topics with parents at home.

How We Can All Invest in Education

Investing in education need not mean higher taxes or more money. True, many schools desperately need more funding, but citizens can contribute in many other ways. In addition to adequate financial support, schools need volunteer help, supplies, equipment, people willing to share their professional and life experiences with students, off-campus sites for innovative learning experiences, and so much more.

Here are a just a few of the ways you can invest in your schools:

- Get involved in a school advisory committee, the PTA or other parent organization, a school site council, or the school board.
- Let elected or appointed officials at the local, state, and national levels know your opinions on laws and policies affecting schools.
- Work with your local schools during financial campaigns. Study the issues, share your opinions, and help if you can.

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- Call the principal or teachers at your local school and ask how you can help. From your own experience, you might be able to share with students how what they're learning will be important in a career.
- If you have children in school, participate in parent-teacher conferences and take an interest in what your children are learning.
- Encourage your business or other organization to give employees time off during the work week to attend parent-teacher conferences or other important school events and activities.
- Tutor a child who needs help.
- Donate books, computers, telephones, art or office supplies, and other materials you know schools could use. Call a principal or teacher and ask what they have on their "wish list" to help them improve education.
- Support political candidates who demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to the need for a well-educated society.

Everybody's job

Everyone in society reaps the benefits of education. Whether or not we have children in school, each of us will one day depend on an educated workforce to sustain a viable and healthy economy. If we hope to maintain or improve the quality of life in our communities, attract new industries, and continue to prosper as a nation, then top-notch schools are essential.

What are the consequences for failing to invest in education? The loss of our free and democratic society, personal frustrations, lost productivity, more populated jails, and increased welfare are only some results of not investing time, money, and other resources into the education of America's children.

Education is the best investment we'll ever make in our children—and our future.

Acknowledgments

AASA has published *How Our Investment in Education Pays Off* to help administrators, teachers, parents, and anyone else concerned about education answer the question, "Why should I support America's public schools?"

Both of the authors brought a wealth of experiences and insights to this book. Rodney Davis, a free-lance education writer, served as director of information services for the Dallas, Texas, Independent School District. He has written several articles, newsletters, and publications on education, including AASA's *The Nongraded Primary....Making Schools Fit Children*. Kristen Amundson is a free-lance education writer in the Washington, D.C., area. She has written numerous AASA publications, including *Keeping Spirits High, Getting Your Child Ready for School*, and *101 Ways Parents Can Help Students Achieve*.

Gary Marx, AASA senior associate executive director, served as project director. Leslie Eckard, AASA publications manager, and Katie Ross, AASA communications assistant, edited the manuscript and coordinated the production process.

Special thanks to Dr. Arthur Gosling, superintendent of the Arlington, Virginia, Public Schools; and to Bruce Hunter, AASA senior associate executive director, for reviewing the manuscript.

Writing and editorial assistance was provided by William Bartlett, with graphics by Lea Bartlett, of East Woods Studios in Sherwood Forest, Maryland.

William Mills of the Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools, provided photographs.

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